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By Louise Laguerre  
Soc 4.01.4 The Serpent

## SERPENT

# Mystery, Not Suspense

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"The Serpent" is about a highly placed Russian security agent, played by Yul Brynner, who defects to the United States and gives the CIA a list of Russian agents holding top jobs in Western European governments.

THE QUESTION predict-

"THE SERPENT" — An AVCO Embassy film produced and directed by Henri Verneuil, screenplay by Verneuil and Gilles Perrault, based on the novel by Pierre Nord, photographed by Claude Renoir, music by Ennio Morricone; with Yul Brynner, Dirk Bogarde, Henry Fonda, Virna Lisi, Philippe Noiret, Michel Bouquet, Elga Anderson, Guy Teyssie and Farley Granger. At the Uptown Theater.

ably, is this: Is he or is he not telling the truth? Henry Fonda, as the head of the CIA, spills the beans at the end. In the meanwhile, those who have seen a great many mystery thrillers may figure it out a little sooner, but the inexperienced will be rather uncomfortably in the dark all the way.

Director Henri Verneuil seems more intent on presenting a poem than telling a story. He rushes through the pithy scenes at a dizzying pace, then wastes time trying to build suspense with

visual and audible tricks. Car doors slam in 4-4 time, men walk long corridors with rhythmic pounding footsteps, slides appear as fingers are snapped, doors slide and slam with painstaking precision.

MOREOVER, the characters talk in short vagaries, snapping out lines like pillowcases on a clothesline. To give such accomplished actors as Yul Brynner, Henry Fonda, Dirk Bogarde and Philippe Noiret that kind of patter is to place a crippling limitation on the move.

This is supposed to be a true story. Yet, however precisely conveyed, all the rhythmic footfalls in the world won't substitute for clarity of story line, and some of us committee members need that kind of thing.